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RURAL CONDITIONS IN THE SOUTH.*

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It is obvious that Doctor Coulter's valuable interpretation of Southern agricultural statistics affords a somewhat narrower basis for discussion than does the topic printed in the program, "Rural Conditions in the South." I shall first discuss some of the matters included in Doctor Coulter's paper and afterward present for consideration some rural conditions with which he has not attempted to deal.

The stress placed by Doctor Coulter upon the significance of the great increase in the valuation of farm property during the past decade in the group of Southern States under consideration leads me to make a suggestion with regard to the interpretation of these and similar property valuation statistics of the census of 1910. From 1860 to 1900 the census figures indicated an increase of the value of farm property in this group of Southern States of only 4 per cent. For the ten years from 1900 to 1910 the total valuation of farm property in these states more than doubled, increasing 102 per cent. This is on its face a very remarkable increase in valuation for the ten-year period as compared with the preceding forty-year period. I do not think, however, that this doubling of farm property valuations can be entirely attributed to the rapidity of agricultural progress in the South; but that it is in considerable part a result of the progressive depreciation of the gold dollar. Land prices have not been an exception in the general rise of prices. The same consideration should be in mind in comparing the increase of 156 per cent. in the value of farm property in the United States as a whole for the forty years 1860 to 1900 with the 100.5 per cent. increase for the ten years from 1900 to 1910. Agricultural progress has been great in the United States and in the South during the past decade, but not so great as comparisons of valuations in 1900 and 1910 might suggest.

Doctor Coulter brings out the fact that Negro farmers have

*Discussion of Doctor Coulter's paper on "The Rural South," Washington, D. C., December 28, 1911.

increased during the past decade at a greater rate than white farmers. The statistics also show—what Doctor Coulter did not point out—that Negro farm owners have been increasing in the South during the past decade at a greater rate than white farm owners. The increase of 70,000 white farm owners is 9.4 per cent. based on the number in 1900; the increase of 23,822 Negro farm owners is about 19 per cent. In Georgia Negro farm owners have increased in number 36.5 per cent. during the decade while white farm owners have increased only 7 per cent. Of all farms in Georgia 42.1 per cent. were operated by Negroes in 1910 as compared with 36.9 per cent. in 1900. Thus the Negroes have been gaining in the South both in farms operated and in farms owned.

To what is this gain of the Negro in the occupation of farming to be attributed? I hope that it is a token of increasing thrift and of increasing ability to maintain a foothold in the economic organization of the South. I should be pleased to feel that we have here evidence of the success of the work of Hampton, Tuskegee, and other similar institutions. I desire to suggest, however, another cause which must have contributed materially to check the increase of white farmers and to add to the number of Negro farmers; that is, the constant recruiting of the class of factory operatives from the white rural population of the South. The large cotton manufacturing industry of the South employs few Negroes. For years whites have been brought from the farming districts to the new and growing manufacturing centers. While the census shows many agricultural counties with stationary or declining population, the new cotton manufacturing towns have in general enjoyed large increases in population. It seems likely that Negro farmers have been taking the places of many white tenants and owners who have forsaken the farm for the mill.

Without further comment on Doctor Coulter's paper, I wish to say a few words about another phase of the rural conditions of the South. I refer to the work of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the improvement of health conditions. This Commission was inaugurated late in 1909 primarily for the eradication of hookworm disease, but also to aid

in general sanitary progress in the South. It has an organization coöperating with the state board of health in most of the Southern States. I have not time to enter into details, but I wish to draw attention to three features of its work with some statement of the results thus far obtained.

An infection survey of the South by counties is being made to determine the degree of hookworm infection. This survey is based upon a microscopical examination of fecal specimens from at least 200 children between the ages of 6 and 18, inclusive, taken at random from the rural schools of each county. In my home state of North Carolina such an infection survey has been completed in 23 counties. The percentage of infection among the children examined in Wake County, in which the capital of the state is located, was 25. In Columbus County the infection percentage of 88 is so far the highest. Infection percentages thus obtained in five parishes of Louisiana range from 15.5 per cent. to 66.6 per cent. Doubtless many cases of infection are mild, and there may be hookworm carriers as well as "typhoid carriers." Since infection commonly occurs through the skin of the feet in contact with polluted soil, I think that a much higher rate will be found among barefooted school children than in the population in general.

Some writers believe that the hookworm disease was brought from Africa to America by the Negroes. In this connection a comparison made in the course of the infection survey of North Carolina is interesting. An examination of 2,092 white school children from various localities in eight counties of North Carolina showed an infection percentage of 34.1. In the same communities an examination of 1,337 colored school children showed only 15 per cent. infected. I do not care to draw a conclusion from a single comparison of this kind. It may in some minds cause doubt whether hookworm disease is peculiarly connected with Africa; others may see in the lower percentage of the Negro children only an indication of immunity against infection, gained after long contact with the disease.

A second line of work being carried on by the Rockefeller Commission is preventive in its nature. Since soil pollution by the afflicted causes the spread of hookworm disease, the

Commission has entered upon a campaign to improve sanitation in the rural districts. This will be equally valuable in lessening the prevalence of typhoid and other filth diseases. As a preliminary step, a sanitary survey of the South by counties is being made. This survey is based on the inspection of conditions at not less than 200 country homes in each county. Standards have been agreed upon by which a percentage value can be given to the typical sanitary conditions found at the rural homes, and a sanitary index can be computed for the county. A knowledge of comparative conditions is sought in order to stimulate zeal for improvement and to enable progress to be measured. In North Carolina sanitary surveys have been completed in 45 counties. The sanitary conditions disclosed are so poor that there is in some quarters reluctance to have the results published.

The most recent development in the campaign against the hookworm is the establishment of free county dispensaries for the treatment of the disease. Such dispensaries were some years ago established and successfully operated by the Porto Rico Anemia Commission in the campaign against hookworm in that island. During the present year they have been inaugurated, in Mississippi, Alabama, and North Carolina with highly satisfactory results.

In North Carolina this work has been undertaken since July 1 and has been supported by joint appropriations by the Boards of County Commissioners, the state, and the Rockefeller Commission. Each dispensary is conducted by a physician in charge and a microscopist. During the first thirty dispensary days 12,500 treatments were administered. So far 25 counties in North Carolina have made provision for the conduct of these free dispensaries, and the dispensaries are being operated simultaneously in series of five counties. The people assembling at the dispensaries, in addition to being examined and treated, hear lectures and information on sanitation and the prevention of disease. At last reports 22,333 cases had been treated since July 1 in dispensaries, and over 24,000 cases have been treated by physicians of the state.